



ANIMA MUNDI PRODUCTIONS

Healing the soul of the world through the arts

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The Canticle of the Black Madonna: A Soldier's Journey *A New Opera Premiering September 5 & 6 at Portland's Newmark Theatre*

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Canticle of the Black Madonna?

The Canticle of the Black Madonna is a new and truly unique opera that seamlessly combines elements of contemporary opera, classical oratorio, Jungian psychodrama, and Greek ritual theater to provide a powerful portrayal of how Post Traumatic Stress impacts the veteran and the family, and to provide a path toward healing the souls of those wounded by war.

Created by Southern Oregon composer Ethan Gans-Morse and librettist Tiziana DellaRovere, it features six principal characters, chorus, and orchestra.

What is the opera about?

Set in Louisiana during the 2010 Gulf Oil Spill, *The Canticle of the Black Madonna* explores the inner and outer worlds of Adam, a fictional American soldier who has recently returned from combat in Afghanistan, and his wife Mara, the manager of Adam's father's oyster farm in Adam's absence. The story centers on Adam's struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Mara's torment as she copes with her husband's violent outbursts and the environmental effects of the spill, and their shared search for emotional, psychological, and spiritual healing and redemption.

Through a rich combination of modern and ancient music, *The Canticle* ultimately reveals the healing power of a primal force of divine love, represented by the Black Madonna, which transforms them both forever and touches all who witness it.

Who is the Black Madonna, and why does she appear in a story about a soldier?

The title character of this opera is not intended to be any representation of the Catholic faith. Rather, the opera employs longstanding icons of faith and mysticism firmly established in the European musical tradition in order to dramatize the perfect mother-love that comes to us in our moments of greatest pain and despair, regardless of religious convictions or lack thereof.

While psychology has much to offer trauma survivors, it is the living experience of this love that enables them to feel whole again. And while many of us are spared the life-shattering traumas experienced by survivors of war, we all share a deep and often repressed craving for this Dark Mother to inhabit us in the midst of our pain and guilt in order to restore our sense of goodness and our sense of belonging to the larger, all-loving family of humanity.

What is the meaning of the title and the word *Canticle*?

A *canticle* is a sacred song. Like the character of the Black Madonna, the use of the word *canticle* in the opera's title draws from centuries of rich cultural heritage in order to refashion new sacred songs,

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new myths, and new incarnations of the healing power of love that are ideally suited to our contemporary world.

Many of the psychic and emotional wounds of war cut so deep that they appear insurmountable to returning veterans and their families. It is here that the invocation of the sacred is essential to the mission of *The Canticle of the Black Madonna*: Not the sacred in the sense of a religious denomination, but the sacred in the sense of the most intimate and universal human experiences of life and death. It is in the realm of sacred song and ritual that the deepest healing is possible, namely the healing of our collective society, both civilian and military.

This sense of the sacred is not unfamiliar to combat veterans. In *What It is Like to Go to War*, Vietnam veteran Karl Marlantes writes,

“Most of us, including me, would prefer to think of a sacred space as some light-filled wondrous place where we can feel good and find a way to shore up our psyches against death. We don't want to think that something as ugly and brutal as combat could be involved in any way with the spiritual. However, would any practicing Christian say that Calvary Hill was not a sacred space?”

Who is producing the world premiere of *The Canticle of the Black Madonna*?

The opera is produced by Anima Mundi Productions, with additional support from *A Rock or Something Productions*, a Portland-based artistic 501.c.3 nonprofit created by and for combat veterans with the stated goal “to promote interaction between the veteran community and the civilian community through writing, stage, film, and music.”

“Anima Mundi” means “the soul of the world” and refers to the animating force that breathes love into all creation across all religions, cultures, and generations. We at Anima Mundi believe that the dire problems afflicting the world today must be confronted openly with a loving heart. We content that the arts are the ideal vehicle for social change and the healing of the wounds of the world because they speak directly to the human unconscious through symbolism, ritual, and shared communal experience.

What direct services does this production offer to military families?

Military families will be our guests for the closed-door final full dress rehearsal on September 4th, where we will have community partners and service providers on site to provide resources and referrals, followed by a facilitated post-performance discussion. We will provide six art therapy workshops for veterans commencing in June of 2014, deliver a psycho-educational peer support seminar for families and family caregivers of injured veterans, and conduct related outreach to veterans groups and service providers.

“Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths...”

“Myth must be kept alive. The people who can keep it alive are the artists of one kind or another.” – Joseph Campbell